

Earliest Art Work of Man

Very Creditable Mural Paintings in Full Colors, Painted by Our Cave Dwelling Ancestors of Prehistoric Days

THE Hall of the Age of Man, a most interesting department of the American Museum of Natural History, New York, is now approaching completion.

This hall, by means of models and pictures, presents a complete view of the various stages in the evolution of man, as well as of the animals that surround him, in the infancy of his development in various parts of the world.

Perhaps the most singular fact about prehistoric man shown here is the high degree of artistic ability which he displayed. It is amazing to find that men living 60,000 years ago, and even more, could make life-like pictures of animals and natural scenes that compare creditably with the work of some of our ablest modern artists.

For example, there is a mural painting in the American Museum which shows the men of the Cro-Magnon period in France, who lived probably 60,000 years ago, decorating the walls of their cave in the Dordogne district. The wall painting which the prehistoric artists are finishing is an exact reproduction of a prehistoric painting actually found in a cave in Dordogne.

The prehistoric painting shows a group of gigantic hairy mammoths who lived at the same time as the artists and must have been one of the most exciting features of their existence. This picture, executed very realistically in colors, therefore gives us a very characteristic scene of life in that early time and corresponds to what an American artist might seek to portray in decorating the walls of a public building in these days.

The prehistoric wall painting may be compared, for instance, with the mural painting executed by Mr. E. H. Blashfield for the court house at Wilkes-Barre, Pa. The artist is one of the best known of contemporary mural painters, and in this work he symbolizes the relation of the law court to our American life. He is our counterpart of the cave-painter and, strange to say, the difference in artistic ability shown is not as great as might be expected.

When Mr. Blashfield's attention was called to this matter he was not at all offended at the suggestion that he might be compared with a prehistoric cave painter, and he furnished this interesting comment:

"There does not seem to be any such thing as absolute and consecutive progress in art. There are variations in different periods, and in each period there is new progress, but usually along lines upon which attention has been newly concentrated."

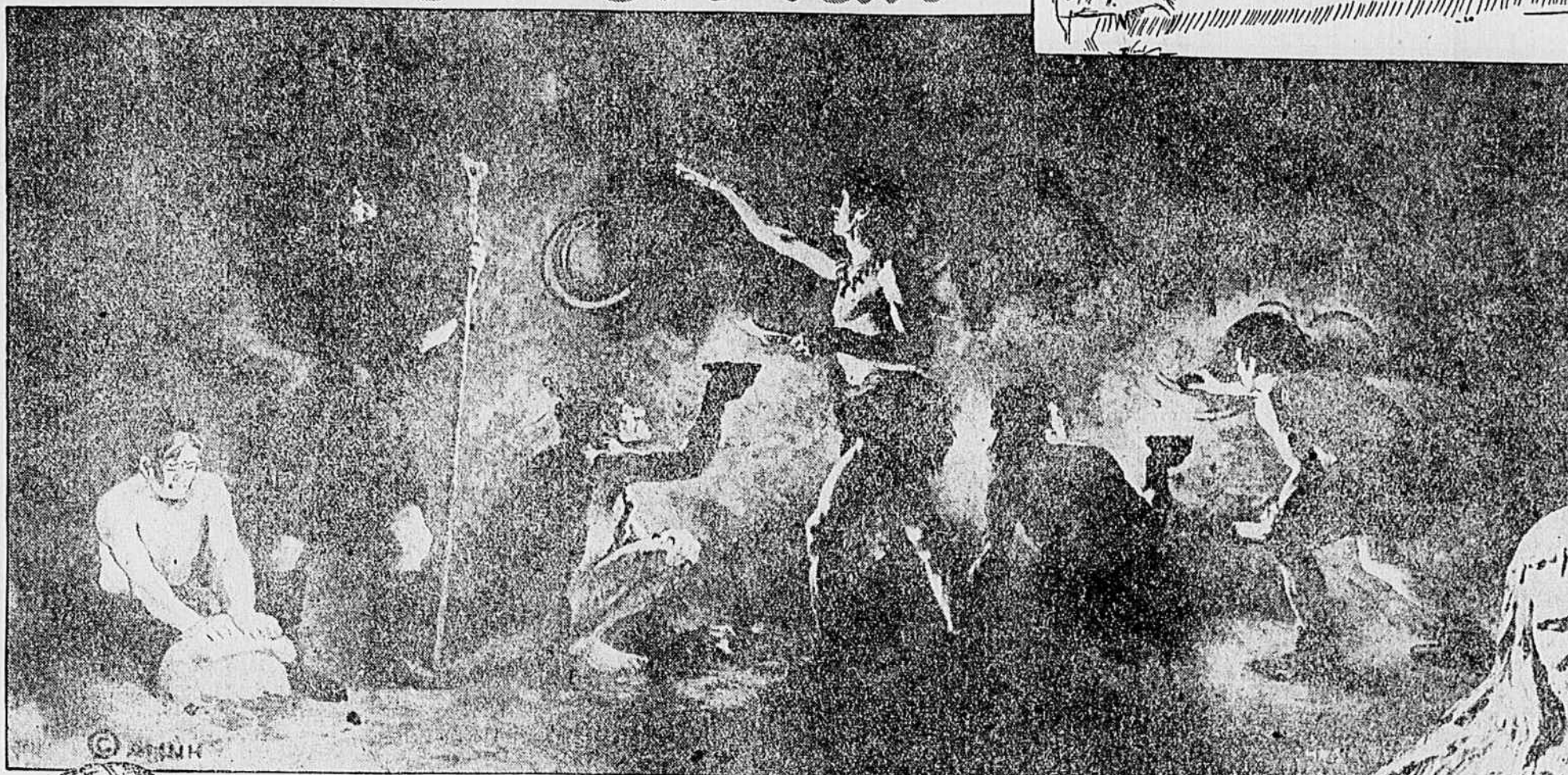
The Greek artists, 2,000 years ago, reached higher points than any other artists; so did the medieval artist, the renaissance artist, the modern artist, each in his turn. But the artists of each epoch reached the highest point in certain qualities only at the cost of losing or ignoring certain other qualities which artists of other epochs developed to a higher degree.

"In a word or two, modern art reaches higher points in certain directions than any earlier art. In certain other directions early art reaches points which no modern art attains."

Of course, these cave men were rough and uncivilized in other respects. They had little social organization, as we understand it today; they had no government, no army, no universities; they had little knowledge of the mechanical arts; in fact, they lacked most of the things that we regard as making up civilization. They had no agriculture and lived by hunting and fishing.

The cave must have been a kind of art school, where many of the tribe stayed at home and learned to paint. This leads to

How Women Wore Their Hair in Their Cave Homes.



Prehistoric Artists Decorating Their Cavern Home, from Painting by Charles R. Knight Under the Direction of Henry Fairfield Osborn, Just Completed for the American Museum of Natural History. Copyright, 1920.



Mural Painting of Justice in the Wilkes-Barre (Pa.) Courthouse, by Mr. E. H. Blashfield, Probably the Foremost Mural Painter of the Day. Copyright by Mr. Blashfield.

A Remarkably Fine Mural Painting in Full Colors of an Ancient Bison Found on the Ceiling of a Cave in France.

the reflection that the hunting and fishing members of the tribe must have been willing to give up a large share of their hard-won game and other spoils in order to support the artists at their refined occupation. Evidently the cave men, while they may have been "low brows" in most respects, were "high brows" in regard to art.

The artistic excellence attained by the cave men raises many important points concerning the doctrine of evolution. These people appear to have suddenly come into existence. There is no record of a long line of ancestors slowly working up to this proficiency in art. Did man evolve by slow stages from his animal state, or did he evolve by sudden jumps at widely separated times and places? This is a great question, which is not yet settled, but which the remains of the cave men may help to clear up.

In order to understand just how advanced these cave men were it is desirable to have the opinion of an expert. Professor Henry Fairfield Osborn, director

of the American Museum, describing this phase of early life, says:

"Contemporaneously with the disappearance of the last glacial period in Europe a highly evolved race, in no respect inferior to modern man, entered that continent from the East and drove out or exterminated the Neanderthal race, of which they were both the mental and physical superiors."

"Their cultural capacity is indicated not alone by their physiognomy and the cubic content of their brain, but has also been demonstrated by the handiwork and especially the artistic productions which they have left in the caves of Southern Europe. The Palaeolithic murals and sculptures in relief painted on the walls of limestone grottoes in France and Spain indicate greater artistic sense and ability than have been found among any other uncivilized people."

The painting made by C. R. Knight for the Hall of the Age of Man represents four Cro-Magnon artists at work on the famous procession of mammoths which was found in the cave of Font-de-Gaume, in Dordogne. Two half-kneeling figures are holding lamps made of hollowed out stones to enable the artists to see clearly in the dimness of the cave. One artist, who is bending over is engaged in incising the outlines of the mammoth on the limestone wall with a sharp flint; the other

artist is laying on the colors, employing a shoulder bone as a pallet. The man sitting down is preparing colors from red and yellow ochre.

The man standing up, with a staff, is a chieftain, who takes care that the artists do their day's work and receive their feed. Everybody should visit the Hall of the Age of Man and see the various steps by which his ancestors emerged from the brute stage. The ancestry of man is held to have begun in Asia two million years, or more ago. He is descended from an ape-like creature, not positively identified. There is in the hall a jaw of a rare fossil animal called the "Propliopithecus," which may have been an ancestor of both men and the existing apes.

We can look at a reproduction of the very early "Pithecanthropus," found in Java, which is neither distinctly an ape nor distinctly human.

A collection of the great man apes enables one to see the exact differences between men and apes.

The earliest known positively human relic is the jaw of the Heidelberg man, a fossil which is believed to be 250,000 years old. The Heidelberg man may have been the ancestor of the Neanderthal race which was widely spread in Europe over a hundred thousand years ago. The Museum possesses the actual remains of a Neanderthal man, found at Krapina.

Along with the Neanderthal man in Europe lived herds of woolly rhinoceroses and woolly mammoths.

The Neanderthals were conquered and largely exterminated by the Cro-Magnon race, who entered from the East and whose artistic work excites so much in-

forest. The contrast between the Cro-Magnon heads and those of the Neanderthals is very wide, as the former are nearly like those of the Caucasian race today.

The Cro-Magnons were displaced by the Neolithic, or "New Stone" race, who showed lower intelligence and artistic ability, but greater combative force.

The new race, which is considered the ancestor of the most warlike nations of today, was chiefly concerned, in a rigorous northern climate, with the struggle for existence, in which the qualities of endurance, tribal loyalty and the rudiments of family life were being cultivated. Ru's huts took the place of caverns and shelters, which were now mostly abandoned.

These conquerors were tall men, with high, narrow skulls, related to the existing Nordic race, more powerful in build than the people of the Swiss Lake Dwellings. Skulls and skeletons representative of this hardy northern type are abundantly known in Scandinavia, but have not found their way to the American Museum collections as yet.

The Hall of the Age of Man is planned to contain four chief collections of the mammals of the world during man's existence.

In Europe prehistoric man hunted the reindeer, the wild horses and cattle and the mammoth. He used the hide of the reindeer for clothing, the flesh and marrow for food. He carved the ivory tusks of the

An Artist of the Cave Dwelling Days, as Reconstructed and Modeled by Modern Scientists.

mammoth. The mammoth, the northern, hairy type of elephant, known to early explorers of fossil remains, was foremost among the great mammals hunted by man. The whole history of this animal family is shown in the Hall of the Age of Man.

The evolution of the elephantine animals or proboscideans culminates in the mastodons and mammoths. This is one of the romances of evolution quite equal in interest to the evolution of the horse. This collection is by far the most complete in existence; it contains as much in the way of complete skeletons as those in all the other museums of the world combined. The early stages in the evolution of the proboscideans, beginning with the Palaeomastodon discovered in the Fayum region of northern Africa, carry us back into times far antecedent to the Age of Man, namely, into an early period of the Age of Mammals, the Oligocene.

Four great murals just completed on the

north walls show life in the Glacial epoch in the Northern Hemisphere. They represent the final glacial stage, the period of the maximum advance of the glaciers over the entire Northern Hemisphere, of the most intense cold, and of the farthest southward extension of the northern types of mammals. This is the time of the Cro-Magnon race, and our knowledge of the mammoths, reindeer and rhinoceroses is derived from the actual Cro-Magnon painting and etchings, chiefly those found within the caverns.

The woolly rhinoceros, like the woolly mammoth, was heavily enwrapped in hair, beneath which was a thick coat of fine wool. With this protection the animal was quite indifferent to the wintry blasts which swept over the steppe-like country of northern France. This golden-brown wool is actually preserved on the side of the face of one specimen discovered, which is now in the Museum of Petrograd. The head of the rhinoceros was long and narrow, like that of the white rhinoceros of Africa, but the jaws were more pointed. It is an animal quite distinct from the great black rhinoceros still extant in Africa, which is a grazer with broad lips.

One mural painting represents two herds, reindeer and mammoth, migrating along the banks of the river Somme, not far from one of the great encampments of men of the Cro-Magnon race. These reindeer and mammoths are, in fact, depicted very precisely in the paintings and engravings left by the Cro-Magnon artists—especially in the cave of Font-de-Gaume. It is a striking fact that in the case of the mammoth every painting, drawing, etching and model given the Cro-Magnon man has given us exhibits exactly the same characters—the long hairy covering, the very high hump above the forehead, the notch between the hump and the neck, the very high shoulder, the short back, the rapid slope of the neck over the hind quarters, the short tail.